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ABSTRACT

Teachers should be concerned with the prevention of reading disabilities rather than emphasizing remediation. Many deprived children in our inner cities are deficient in areas necessary for successful learning. Characteristics of deprived, inner city children which cause learning problems are listening, speaking, experiences, mobility, immediate physical needs, abstractions, best learning, and mismatched systems. Basal readers exhibit characteristics which cause problems for inner city children: (1) over reliance on configuration of context clues, (2) disparity between child's spoken language and book language, (3) lack of sufficient practice and exercise in skills learned in different settings, (4) gaps in instruction and the thinking process, (5) attempting too much, and (6) stressing an analytic method. A study comparing an analytic and synthetic method of teaching reading was conducted on 420 inner city kindergarten children. Eighty-one matched pairs were assigned to three control and three experimental classes. By the end of the second grade the experimental structured reading program proved to be more effective for the total group in spelling of phonetically regular words, freedom from spelling reversals, and number of words and sentences written. (WR)

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"A Comparison of Analytic and Synthetic Methodology in Beginning Reading for Disadvantaged Children"

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by Lillian R. Putnam

An increasing number of deprived children in our inner cities are remedial readers by mid-point of first grade. The cumulative deficit is beginning. Apparently what we have done and are presently doing is unsuccussful. The increased time devoted to remedial reading is not the answer. We need not quantitative changes but qualitative changes. For too long the emphasis of our concern has been on the remediation of reading disabilities. The time is now, is indeed late. We should be concerned with the prevention of these disabilities. This paper discussed three facets of the problem: first, the characteristics of inner-city, deprived children which cause learning problems, second, the characteristics of basal readers which cause problems for them, and the report of one research study related to this problem.

I CHARACTERISTICS OF DEPRIVED, INNER-CITY CHILDREN WHICH CAUSE LEARNING PROBLEMS.

A. LISTENING - They are accustomed to hearing short commands in contrast to lengthy paragraphs of explanation given in school, so their attention span in listening is usually short and they are easily distracted.

B. SPEAKING - Many of the dialect differences are also reflected in their problems of auditory discrimination (Hoffman, 1968). If they fail to speak the sound they fail to hear it and vice versa, i.e. th becomes f as in mouf,,diphthongs become monothongs, boy - bo.

The vocabulary used by these children is rich and colorful, but it has distinct meanings: "big juice" - a white racketeer, "happy shop" -

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liquor store, "stumpers" - shoes, "laid in the aisle" - well dressed. (Newsweek). The writer has sat in first grade classrooms and listened to children talk in "show and tell." Between the different dialects and the different vocabulary meanings used it was frequently impossible to understand what the child was saying.

When items which are vulnerable to dialect changes are removed from reading tests, the scores of deprived children are less depressed. Hutchinson scored Metropolitan Reading Tests given to 2nd grade black children in Washington, D.C. in 1967. Forty percent of the children read below grade level and twenty percent read one full year below grade level. After removing items vulnerable to dialect biases, she found on the second scoring that only twenty six percent of the children read below grade level, and only six percent read one full year below grade level. (Hutchinson, 1972)

The structural and syntactical differences in their speech are not reflected in reading material, ex. "mother she be gone."

C. EXPERIENCES - There is a great deprivation of experiences and concepts which are expected in basal readers. The majority of one class had not travelled beyond the school apartment block and local grocery store.

D. MOBILITY - The high mobility within the city subjects them to a variety of materials and methods, and therefore therefore the demands of one method fails to fulfill those of another and few things get learned well. If a child is taught with the Lippincott Series in September in grade one, and moves in January to another school using Scott-Foresman Series, he

is in trouble. The Scott-Foresman Series is based on a sight vocabulary, which he doesn't have.

E. IMMEDIATE PHYSICAL NEEDS - The immediate physical needs of food, shelter etc. are so strong that the psychological reward of a teacher's smile of approval is of minimal effect. They need immediate feedback of success; they cannot wait for delayed reenforcement.

F. ABSTRACTIONS - Although most learning procedes from the concrete to the abstract, their abstracts are different - more things are abstractions to them. "So they need more concreteness," as Hilda Taba expresses it (Taba, 1966).

G. BEST LEARNING- They seem to learn best or to learn only when:

teaching is done in the easiest possible sequential order.

each step is determined by task analysis and is based on the previous one mastered.

the task is presented in "bite sized chunks," (like Shredded Wheat spoon sized biscuits).

they have much practice using skills in different settings.

there is physical action to produce involvement and attention.

One child expressed it well by saying, "If you tell me, I might remember; if you show me, I might understand; if you have me do it, I can make it my own !"

H. MISMATCHED SYSTEMS - The child's phonological system does not match the grapheme system.

"Do you remember when it happened 187

II CHARACTERISTICS OF BASAL READERS WHICH CAUSE PROBLEMS.

Why do the children fail the books? We should reverse this question and ask, "Why do the books fail the children?" In typical basal readers:

A. Early word recognition is based on total configuration, context or pictorial clue. As the vocabulary load increases, the child cannot remember, and is forced to guess. This reduces his dependence on his own skills and reinforces his feelings of inadequacy. Thus the fetters are forged. Word identification based on pictorial clues has minimal transfer to new words.

B. Teaching vowel sounds is largely deferred to Grade II, this reduces the use of word recognition skills by forcing over reliance on configuration or context clues.

C. Basals depend heavily on spoken language and concepts developed in preschool years. The language in reading materials is very similar to the spoken language used by less deprived children. Language used by inner-city children is very different from that used in reading materials. Spoken language of the inner-city child is less like written language syntactically, grammatically, and in overall sequential progression. So one should expect relatively less positive transfer from their verbal experience to the formal language of books. For the inner-city child, reading and writing is different from their natural speech. "Middle class language is more flexible, detached and subtle in descriptive aspects." (Bernstein, 1960)

223

D. Basals fail to give sufficient practice and exercise in skills learned in different settings. Jensen speaks of the "hierarchy of pre-requisite learning," (Jensen, 1968). Basals fail to build steps in that hierarchy. These children need skills to "learn how to learn." Jensen showed that children from low-class Mexican groups did poorly in paired-associated learning, but better than their Anglo counterparts in serial learning. But paired-associate learning tasks depend on past verbal experiences while serial learning tends to reflect a more basic learning ability. Basals rely heavily on paired-associate learning tasks.

E. Basals leave gaps in instruction and in the thinking processes which they expect the child to know or supply himself. Deprived children lack the verbal skills or the abstract thinking experiences to do these. However they can do them if the skills are taught.

F. Basals attempt too much; they try to teach too many things at once, so the child can't select the focal points. A 15 minute discussion of concepts presented in four lines of print gives him a vast kaleidiscope of new learnings. He can't determine or select the relevant task being stressed. To teach simple decoding skills is sufficient at the time. We should teach a few things well so he can lean on them.

G. The typical basal stresses an analytic method. It starts with a whole word and breaks it down to teach the phonic generalizations. This is inductive teaching because it starts with examples and draws out the

generalization. Many children do not and cannot learn by this method.

III A SAMPLE STUDY COMPARING AN ANALYTIC AND SYNTHETIC METHOD. (Putnam & Youtz. Project No. 7-8079,1968.)

In 18th Avenue School, Newark, Experimental classes were taught with the Structured Reading Series. Control classes were taught with Winston Basal Series, which was the basal currently used in the school. The reasons for selecting the Structural Reading Series as an example of a synthetic method were as follows:

1. It stresses precision of articulation and auditory discrimination.
2. It stresses the consistent grapheme-phoneme relationship in beginning reading, and teaches word analysis clues for early independence.
3. It uses and applies consistent principles and thus reduces the need for guessing. It teaches how to "learn how to learn."
4. The increment of task difficulty is in "bite sized" chunks. Each step is based on mastery of the previous one.
5. It avoids the blending problems of typical phonic programs by combining initial consonant and vowel into a unit and adding final consonants.
6. The decoding skills are taught with a direct relationship to very concrete items or pictures which are not culturally biased.
7. Comprehension is stressed.
8. Humor is used effectively.

A. PROCEDURE - From a total population of 420 kindergarten children, 81 matched pairs were assigned to three control and three experimental classes. Pair matching was done on Lee Clark Reading Test, kindergarten teachers evaluations, intact family and sex. Final data analysis was done on 36 matched pairs. All subjects were black or English speaking Puerto Rican. Teachers in both groups volunteered.

Consultation services and visitations were offered equally to all teachers to reduce the Hawthorne effect. The average IQ was 93. No significant differences were found in mental ability between the groups as measured by the Kent Emergency Scales and the Block Design of the WISC.

B. RESULTS - At the end of the first grade, the control group was significantly superior in both vocabulary and comprehension on the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test. But at the end of the second grade, the experimental group in the Structured program had become equivalent, and there was no significant difference between them in Reading. The experimental group in the Structured program, however became significantly superior, in:

a. spelling of phonetically regular words.

b. freedom from reversals in spelling.

c. writing a total number of words.

The Highest Third Subgroup in the basal were significantly superior in vocabulary and comprehension, but the structured subgroup were superior in writing total words and in freedom from reversals.

The Lowest Third Subgroup in the structured program were significantly superior in Spelling Test II (phonetically regular words), in spelling total number of words, and in writing total number of words. There were no significant differences in reading.

C. SUMMATION - Although there were no significant differences in the Vocabulary or Comprehension Tests of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests the experimental structured reading program proved to be significantly more effective for the total group (36 matched pairs):

a. in spelling of phonetically regular words.

b. in freedom from spelling reversals.

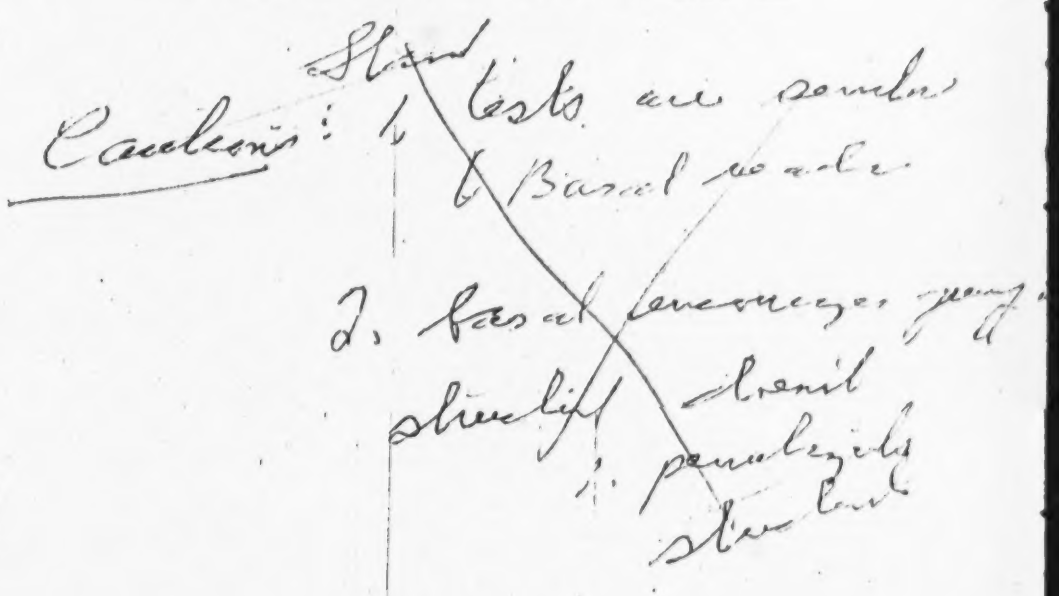
c. in number of words and sentences written.

The basal program was not found to be significantly more effective for the total group in any measure analyzed.

In the inner-city population, the lowest subgroup are the potential candidates for remediation. We should therefore direct our attention to this group. This study showed that with the Structured Reading program, these children were significantly superior in spelling phonetically regular words, in spelling a total number of words, and in writing a total number of words while maintaining equivalence in reading with those taught by the analytic method. Thus the synthetic method as presented by the Structured Reading Series appears to be more effective for these inner-city children.

Although the synthetic method may take longer because the process is slow, it may be preferable for some inner-city children.

Since the analytic method of the typical basal reader has not brought the success we desire, we would be wise to direct our attention to synthetic structured methods similar to that used in this study.



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